

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 944

CS 511 631

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TITLE Societal Trends and the Curriculum.
PUB DATE 2002-11-30
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Educational Environment; Elementary
Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Social Change;
*Sociocultural Patterns
IDENTIFIERS *Reflective Thinking; Social Transition

ABSTRACT

Curriculum becomes increasingly relevant as it is based on what exists in society and what the implications are for student learning. The growing emphasis upon scripted teacher-proof programs and regimented student tasks has marginalized time for purposeful thinking and meaningful dialogue. This loss is significant because reflection supports students and teachers in connecting with what they already know, considering alternative perspectives, solving problems, and organizing their experiences for future use. The way time is spent in schools and universities indicates what people value, and the loss of time to reflect indicates a shift away from valuing students and teachers as thinkers. This paper first considers which trends are important, pinpointing employment trends, the importance of clean air and water, conservation of energy sources, the importance of providing a good education for all, wise use of leisure time, the importance of health care coverage for people in the United States, a changing society, and democracy as a way of life and a form of government. The paper also discusses two additional trends in society: wars and rumors of wars and the necessity of working out solutions, and the excess number of individuals in penal institutions, especially from minority groups. (Contains 12 references.) (NKA)

ED 473 944

Societal Trends and the Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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SOCIETAL TRENDS AND THE CURRICULUM

Teachers and school administrators need to be students of studying and analyzing trends in society. These trends need to provide content for studying objectives in curriculum development. The curriculum becomes increasingly relevant as it is based on what exists in society and what their implications are for pupil learning. There are a plethora of trends in society, but a few will be chosen to assist students of the curriculum to think of what is relevant to emphasize from the societal arena. Trends chosen may vary from area to area, but, no doubt, there will be commonalities.

The growing emphasis upon scripted teacher proof programs and regimented student tasks has marginalized time for purposeful thinking and meaningful dialogue. This loss is significant because reflection supports students and teachers in connecting with what they already know, considering alternative perspectives, solving problems, and organizing their experiences for future use. The way we spend our time in schools and universities indicates what we value, and the loss of time to reflect indicates a shift away from valuing students and teachers as thinkers (Short, et. al., 2002).

Which Trends Are Important?

The learning environment through the project approach can provide students with many attractive work choices and opportunities to develop interests in collaboration with their peers. In this learning context, students are able to negotiate with the teacher to address their own personal learning needs and style preferences as well as curriculum outcomes. Research about effective learning from the fields of psychology and neuroscience continues to emphasize the importance of addressing student interests (Chard and Flockhart, 2002).

Unemployment in a region appears to be a perennial problem. The problem may be that jobs are indeed scarce. There is futility in going to the unemployment office to seek listings of places to work. At the unemployment office, the lines might be long. Feelings of disgust may be there due to negative reports on job possibilities. The problem may be, too, that there are jobs, but they require much education and/or training. For example, the following may appear as job openings at the employment office:

1. diesel engine mechanic wanted.
2. trained carpet layer wanted.

3. cabinet builder wanted, work experience in this area necessary.
4. pharmacists wanted, previous experience desired.
5. veterinarian wanted in an established small animal hospital.

Numbers four and five of the above require much education such as the pharmacist as well as the veterinarian with a DVM degree from an accredited university. Numbers two and three require highly developed skills learned over the years at the work place, such as in becoming a good carpet layer or cabinet builder. Number one above, being a diesel mechanic, requires meeting vocational and technical school requirements as well as quality practical experience.

Workers still may be able to obtain fast food restaurant jobs. These tend to pay minimum wage with no health insurance coverage and with no retirement plans from these companies being in the offing. Those who lack education and training for specific professions and prestigious jobs are left out of having the good things in society. Pertaining to these trends, what are the implications for pupils in the curriculum who presently are in the public school setting?

1. pupils need to achieve as optimally as possible in the school setting. Higher education or vocational technical schooling should be in the offing. A highly educated and trained work force needs to be in evidence so that increased knowledge, skills, and abilities are shown by workers to employers at the work place.

2. pupils need to assess personal strengths and weaknesses so that increased data is available for decision making in securing a future job or position (Ediger, 2002, 191-195).

Trend two emphasizes the importance of clean air and clean water . With a plethora of pesticides and herbicides being used to control animal pests as well as weeds, the federal, state, and local governments need to be vigilant about people using too many chemicals in the environment. To develop and maintain a clean environment, conducive to healthful living is a must. Without a quality physical environment with clean water, futile situations exist for human beings. It takes healthy human beings to think about and implement innovations necessary to protect the environment. The following become important items in curriculum development pertaining to the natural environment:

1. an adequate number of units of study need to be

developed and taught pertaining to "Living in a Clean Environment."

2. a careful selection of knowledge, skills, and attitudinal objectives should be emphasized in the curriculum. A variety of evaluation techniques need to be used to ascertain pupil present progress as well as determine what is left to teach.

3. a good current events curriculum might well keep pupils abreast of news about the environment (Parker, 2001).

Trend three stresses the importance of conserving energy sources. Automobiles, heavily used, do contribute to their share of energy use. Inefficient home use of energy sources also contributes to the heavy use of valuable natural resources. Fossil fuels are heavily used and cannot be recreated. Once the fossil fuels are used up, there are no additional fuels of this kind available. Thus, petroleum products are valuable and they are nonrenewable. It then becomes necessary to harness and use more of the renewable energy sources

1. wind in which those who have installed generators to be propelled by wind find their home heating bills greatly reduced. In fact, a wind propelled generator can actually put more current into a power line as compared to what is taken therefrom. This amounts to income to be received by those who possess the wind driven sources of energy.

Two wind farm developments companies are after Wichita County's wind resources, hoping to build 200 to 300 foot tall wind turbines on the western Kansas prairie.

It was Wichita County's Economic Development that helped get Renewable Energy Systems North America and enXco interested in the area's wind. A predominately agricultural community with 2500 residents, the organization was looking for a way to boost the economy.

Both companies hope to do just that if the project is deemed feasible.

"Western Kansas is the Saudi Arabia of wind," said Bud Pickle, project consultant with enXco... Of course, Kansas has wind everywhere."

About fifty people attended the wind farm discussion Thursday during the Wichita County Economic Development meeting hoping to learn more about the proposed project (Bickle, November 23, 2002).

2. water whereby the sloping stream, oceans, or river sends currents at a high rate of speed which in return drives the

commercial generator to produce electricity. Water, here, is renewable, but there are problems with pollution in that sea life has died due to overheated water coming from cooling the generator. Problems need identification and solutions are necessary .

3. geothermal energy which contains heat coming from the interior of the earth. It is expensive to tap this form of renewable energy so it can be used for heating buildings during the cold season. Reykjavik, the capitol city of Iceland, uses much geothermal energy. The city of Monrovia, Utah also uses considerable geothermal energy.

4. solar energy is clean and a renewable source of energy. People who have houses with solar collectors have found that it can cut down much on costs of heating buildings. The power of solar energy can be noted when getting in to an automobile on a cold, sunny day. If the automobile has been parked in the open sunlight, the interior will be quite comfortable. It can be expensive to have solar collectors on houses, but it does save energy on heating buildings (See Holt Science and Technology, 2000, Chapter Six).

Nuclear energy has been used in certain places in the United States. Nearby Harrisburg, Pennsylvania is a large nuclear reactor which provides energy for this area of the United States. There is always fear of a breakdown of nuclear reactors, thus causing leakage of radio active products. It is extremely necessary to monitor radiation leaks which has caused harmful effects to individuals including cancer in its diverse forms. Pupils need to study different forms and sources of energy including coal and wood. They must learn about the the concepts of renewable and nonrenewable energy sources. Also, it is salient to learn about the harmful side affects of using each energy source. With a spiraling number of human beings on the planet earth, it behooves all to conserve energy wherever possible. For example, the United States has grown from a population of 130 million in 1940 to 285 million in the year 2003. Each human being is a user of different energy forms. The question arises, "Can individuals continue to use energy to meet the increasing demands for sustenance and for a high life style?"

It is necessary to audit uses of different levels of energy. Thus, a building can become more economical in its use by turning off lights when these are not used. Better insulation of a building can make for tremendous improvements in the uses of energy. Turning the thermostat down to an approved temperature reading for night during the winter months can certainly make a difference in uses of energy. During the day

time when school is in session, the thermostat should be set at a comfortable level, but not waste energy due to having an excessively warm classroom. Pupils need to study and help in monitoring ways of saving energy.

In an industrialized nation, there are always problems of what to do with solid waste products (See Guy, et. al., 2002). Most of these are non-biodegradable such as car batteries, outworn refrigerators, ranges, dish washers, cars, tires, plastic pipes and toys, among others. Some of these items are recycled, in part, such as outworn car bodies. Biodegradable items do recycle such as weeds, straw, dead animals, dead trees, and crop residue. Hog complexes in which 100,000 hogs are raised and processed in one calendar year cause terrible odor problems. They also provide problems with what to do with the large amount of manure produced. Hog spills are somewhat common which contaminate the earth and can produce ideal situations for disease. Even then, waste products from hogs are recyclable. Can an industrialized nation keep manufacturing and continue to develop economically and yet maintain a clean environment? This will continue to be a major problem in society (See Preston and Herman, 1981).

Trend four emphasizes the importance of providing a good education for all. It is necessary to continue receiving as much formal as well as informal education as possible. One can never know too much about a given topic or field of endeavor. Standards keep going up in terms of educational needs of individuals. In the United States in 1940, for example, 50 per cent of the available students graduated from high school. Presently, the emphasis has been for all to graduate from high school as a minimal level. Estimates vary as to how many do graduate. When the General Educational Development (GED) is included, the equivalent of 90 per cent end up as graduates. Is this adequate for today's sophisticated society? The answer is a resounding, "No." Post high school formal education should include a baccalaureate degree in a marketable area or vocational training for those so inclined. Vocational education, beyond high school, needs to have as much importance as does the baccalaureate degree from a university. There certainly is a real need for good automobile mechanics, builders of homes and other buildings, carpet layers, plumbers, and electricians. These are and must be highly skilled persons engaging in serving the practical needs of human beings in society.

Going beyond the baccalaureate degree emphasizes specialization in diverse endeavors. Excellent teachers and instructors, school administrators, doctors, dentists, and

lawyers, among others are certainly needed in society. The demands from each of these continually goes upward. People in society expect much, for example, from a medical doctor in today's society. The life span of individuals continues to rise. It is common to see newspaper obituaries of the deceased who have lived ninety years. At the turn of the twentieth century, the average age of death of individuals was fifty years; this has gone up to 74 years presently. Improved nutrition and better medical care has certainly increased the life span of human beings in the United States.

Pupils in the elementary school need to have an adequate number of units of study on healthful living and proper medical care. The well being of each person is important for optimal achievement being possible in the world of work.

Trend five stresses the wise use of leisure time. With a forty hour work week, people need to be able to use leisure time which enriches the self. Too frequently, individuals engage in doing things detrimental to personal health and a misuse of time. Immoral acts, drinking alcoholic beverages, tobacco use, and wasteful spending of money, takes its toll of individuals who should use their very own resources to read, travel, interact with others, engage in wholesome recreation, and participate in worthwhile clubs and organizations. Individuals also need to be involved in civic and community endeavors, working for the betterment of all in society.

Pupils need to experience quality objectives pertaining to the world of work as well as toward wise use of leisure time. Units of instruction taught on carefully selected careers, kindergarten through grade twelve, need to be chosen and put into operation within teaching and learning situations.

Trend six emphasizes the importance of health care coverage for people in the United States. A news report just listened to by the author stated that 40 per cent of the population have no health coverage at all. This leaves 60 per cent who do, but many of these will be minimal level coverage indeed. Good health has become a privilege and not a right of citizens. People with high incomes can afford the best of medical care through insurance coverage. The low income persons probably depend upon good luck and thereby hope to avoid illnesses requiring medical care, including hospitalization. Poor people have medicaid as their provider of medical services, but this is, by no means, a substitute for medicare. Medicare, as well as medicaid, is financed federally by the social security funds, coming from worker payroll taxes. To be sure to do well in school work and in life in general, all need to be covered with adequate

health insurance. Good health care should be a right for all, not merely a privilege for the few. There are too many pupils coming to school who have disabling allergies, asthma, severe colds, and breathing problems from enlarged adenoids and tonsils. Eye glasses are needed by pupils who have defective vision. Added to these problems are mentally retarded pupils, individuals with Downs Syndrome, hearing deficits, juvenile diabetes, autism, physically handicapped, and behaviorally disordered, among other handicaps. An increased number of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome children are also located in the school setting. It behooves all to be concerned about the rights of children, as well as others, in the societal arena. A society benefits as its individuals are able to live the good life. When a segment of society is permitted to fall through the cracks, then the totality of individuals realizes negative consequences, such as with crime in its many manifestations. The individual should not be separated from the group, nor should the group be separated from the individual, due to a community consisting of the whole, not a part of something (See Ellis and Esler, 2001)

Trend seven consists of a changing society. One thing is certain in life and that is the concept of change. Change is all around us. As one segment of society, there have been tremendous changes in agriculture. The author as a high school student, 1942- 1946, gathered eggs into a pail by going to each nest, side by side. These nests then contained the eggs from 300 laying hens. No farmer today would have 300 laying hens. Egg producers continually have more laying hens. In the late 1970s, many farms managed some 1200 laying hens. This is a very small operation presently. Fifty thousand to one hundred thousand cage layers are located in one area. In Buchanan County, Iowa there is a new, large laying hen operation with seven million cage layers. The cages, each holding 6 to 8 laying hens, are in rows about one-fourth mile in length within a laying house structure. The eggs from the caged hens drop down gently onto a conveyor belt. After pressing a button or turning a switch, the eggs move along on the conveyor belt to the end of the long row where they are placed automatically into a case. Most of the manual labor has been replaced by machine. The mash (finely ground feed) also is augured automatically down to the different troughs next to the rows of cages for hens to eat. Water flows automatically into a trough for a supply of drinking water. The manager or assistant manager walk up and down the rows of cages to notice if machines for delivering mash and water are working. Laying hens need to have feed and water available continuously for optimum egg production to occur.

Automatically timed clocks go on at 4 AM in the morning so that the cage layers experience a seventeen hour work day during the winter months. Egg production has gone up much since the author worked on his father's farm during his high school years. At that time sixty per cent of the laying hens laid eggs each day as an average as compared with today's ninety per cent. The cage layers are generally provided by a commercial company to the laying hens' facilities and put into cages. Generally, each year, a new set of laying hens arrives to replace the old layers at the laying house scene.

The mash (feed) is also trucked in by the commercial company to a bin which in return augurs the mash into the troughs of the laying hens. A commercial truck also comes in to pick up the eggs. Ultimately, the cartons of eggs arrives at the supermarket for consumer purchasing. Laying houses may be air conditioned in summer and heated in winter during the cold months depending upon their geographical location.

The author has attempted to paint a picture of automation in egg production. Mass production of eggs is in the offing, rather than the small, family sized farm being involved in producing eggs for the nation's dinner tables.

In the area of growing farm crops, the farmer may well have an air conditioned cab on the tractor as well as on the self propelled combine. Both have electric lights, power steering, and hydraulic lifts such as in the tractor lifting or lowering implements with the touch of a lever (See Physical Science, 1999).

From the above listed changes and changes in all facets of work, pupils should study how work is performed differently as compared to earlier times. Changes in manufacturing, at the work place, in the home, and at diverse places of business need to be studied, analyzed, and understood. Pupils should develop attitudes of acceptance toward positive changes in the societal arenas. The school curriculum, too, needs to change as innovations appear on the horizon. Each innovation must be assessed in terms of inherent qualities. Blindly accepting what is new is not acceptable, but needs to be evaluated in terms of desired criteria.

Trend number eight stresses democracy as a way of life and as a form of government. Pupils in school need to learn about democracy as a major tenet being important in society. In the classroom setting, pupils with teacher assistance need to have opportunities to establish standards of conduct. These standards need to be reasonable, realistic, and realized.

Standards such as the following are important in school committee work (Ediger and Rao, 2003, Chapter Eleven):

- * all participate in the discussion and ongoing group work
- * no one should dominate the deliberations
- * careful attention should be given by participants to what transpires in committee endeavors
- * respect for all participants is highly salient
- * each person's ideas need to be respected
- * esteem needs must be met whereby contributions from each are valued
- * all should feel a sense of belonging to the committee or group
- * rude behavior needs to be identified and remedied. No one is an island unto themselves
- * each needs to contribute optimally; no one should let others do all/most of the work
- * ideas need to be presented to the total group, not to a segment of members
- * content and skills not understood should be clarified as to meaning and understanding
- * higher levels of cognition should be stressed such as critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving
- * chair persons should invite all to participate, not just the few only
- * self discipline is an ideal to strive toward for all committee members
- * the interests of all committee members should be obtained
- * discussions for purposeful committee work must be in the offing.

Committee endeavors need to be evaluated by participants with teacher guidance. The following need careful assessment:

- * each pupil contributing to his/her optimum in committee work
- * pupils working on meaningful projects until completion
- * pupils respecting contributions of others
- * pupils aiding each other to do their best in committee work
- * pupils being interested in and perceiving reasons for leaning
- * pupil products and processes being evaluated in terms of positive criteria
- * pupils putting forth optimal effort to do the best possible
- * pupils doing better individually than previously

- * pupil interests being encouraged throughout the project toward completion
- * pupils, individually, doing their best work possible, according to his/her abilities.

The area of motivation is both broad and complex. What seems to be motivating to one person is not to another. However, one often useful technique is to show learners what they will be able to do when they finish the instruction. This is more than a statement of the objective of the instruction, which is the next component of the instructional strategy. It is the instructor's demonstration, written description, or illustration of what the learner will be able to do. The initial part of the instruction may also consist of some historical background or interesting fact about what is to be learned. It is important to note that there is no objective for this information, so it will not be tested. It is simply a means of attracting the student to the instruction (Dick and Carey, 1985).

In Conclusion

There are a plethora of trends in society. The author has just scratched the surface of listing and analyzing these trends. No doubt, the following are equally salient:

1. wars and rumors of wars and the necessity of working out solutions, hopefully, between and among nations involved are musts! The destruction of buildings, killing and maiming of human beings, developed mental illness of war participants, refugees, as well as bitterness and futility of life in losing homes and family members, among others.

2. excess number of individuals in penal institutions, especially from minority groups. There is inadequate attention paid to economic, educational, social, and individual successes of minority people

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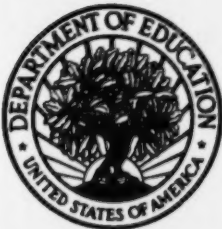
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